

Hawaii Works To Support a Clear Course of Action on Tourism

HONOLULU — Six committees that grew out of an April tourism summit convened by Gov. Linda Lingle took a step forward last week when the committees' volunteer members presented their findings and recommendations to the governor. Their goal: ensuring that the various elements of Hawaii's tourism industry support a clear course for the industry and make a unified presentation to legislators before the state legislature reconvenes in January.

COMMITTEE TOPICS

The six committees include airlift, accountability, marketing and dedicated funding, and Lingle and other interested parties heard their report at the state capitol on May 22. Presented was a 39-page assessment of challenges and solutions, as well as checklists for specific tasks so that those involved can prepare and present a cohesive plan to the next session of the state legislature.

A widespread concern among those in the tourism industry has been just how much of the mon-

ey the state collects in hotel-room taxes is being invested in the health of the state's single largest industry. In 1998, a bill signed into law by former Gov. Ben Cayetano created the Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) and earmarked 37.9 cents of every room-tax dollar for its programs, including long-range planning and marketing and other tourism activities.

The understanding was that as tax revenues grew, the money going to the authority would increase proportionately, says Murray Towill, president of the Hawaii Hotel Association and a summit participant. Along the way, however, a cap was put in place, and earlier this year the legislature reduced the percentage of funding to 32.6 percent.

This reduction drew fire during the forum from Lingle, who took office in January. "We need to have a reliable source and a reasonable level of funding," she told attendees. "When the government makes a pact with industry, it's important that we honor our compact. If we don't go back to the original level, it's



“When the government makes a pact with industry, it's important that we honor our compact.”

—Linda Lingle

clear to me we won't be able to address additional needs.”

Lingle pledged that by the end of June, she would name a person to sit on her cabinet in the new post of tourism liaison. She

also promised to take action to ensure that airlift to Hawaii continues to be strong.

Each committee made a number of observations and recommendations and provided an action plan; the following are among the highlights.

Airlift: Encourage and creatively support new and increased nonstop air service from underserved markets, and establish an airport system that breaks even and provides predictable, stable costs for carriers, convenience for customers and efficiency for service providers by Sept. 1. Develop an overall strategy and implementation plan by Oct. 31.

Ke Kumu: The committee reviewing the HTA's guiding document, Ke Kumu, noted that it is strategic rather than tactical—that it doesn't spell out action items, rank the allocation of resources, or provide standards of measurement and accountability.

Funding: This committee said that funding plans should be in line with the direction of Ke

Continued on page 103

Hawaii Tourism

Continued from page 16

Kumu. The HTA should develop an action plan by Oct. 30 to work with the administration and legislators to restore funding to 37.9 percent, uncapped and with no provisos. "Without those additional funds the HTA is hamstrung," said Towill, who co-chaired the committee. "It cannot take on initiatives that everyone agrees need to be accomplished."

HTA: The committee addressing the role and composition of the authority board wants these roles defined by June 16 and for a selection com-

mittee to choose candidates by June 30.

Marketing Proposals: Even as the HTA is reviewing bids it has received for leisure and corporate meetings and incentives (CMI) contracts spanning 2004 to 2007, this committee is focused on ensuring that the process reaps the greatest possible benefit to the state while eliminating disruption in Hawaii's tourism marketing.

Accountability and Measurement: Key among this committee's recommendations is that the focus be shifted from methods and processes to whether results are achieved.

— **By Camie Foster**
cfoster@advanstar.com